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The Tale of a Cannon: Alexandria to Brink's

The anti-tank gun used to blow up a Brink's vault in Syracuse, N.Y., by thieves last weekend who made off with \$416,000, was bought in Alexandria, Va., and whisked from under the noses of law enforcement officials in upstate New York.

The 20mm. cannon was bought from Potomac Arms in Alexandria, which is directly across the street from Inter-armco, importer of the guns.

John Richards, owner of Potomac Arms, said a man in his late 30s came into his store and, after much talk, said he wanted to buy two of the guns, seven-foot long Finnish-made weapons.

The man also wanted 200 rounds of ammunition for the cannon.

Richards said the man gave his name as John Finch and his address in the 600 block of Oronoco Street, Alexandria.

Richards, who has lived in Alexandria all his life, doubted the man's identification. He called the Alexandria police, who checked quickly and told him the name and address were false.

Richards then called the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI, which had no jurisdiction in such a matter, notified all the law enforcement agencies that would concerned.

Stalling the customer, Rich-

ards said the guns would be available for him the next day. When the man showed up again, Richards helped him pack the weapons and the ammunition and put them in a panel truck.

The gun buyer took them to the Alexandria office of Railway Express, where he addressed them to Plattsburgh, N.Y., from a false Alexandria address.

The authorities in upstate New York, including the New York state police and the Plattsburgh city police, were waiting when the cannon arrived at the Railway Express office there.

No one showed up to claim the guns when the office closed at 5 p.m. so the authorities, believing the weapons were secure there, left.

But during the night the office was broken into and the guns and ammunition stolen.

The next news of the weapons came in the Brink's burglary in Syracuse last weekend.

One of the guns had been used to blast through the vault doors. The cannon had been equipped with a home-made silencer.

A similar attempt with an anti-tank gun had been made to blast through a Brink's vault in Quebec, Canada, last February, but the thieves apparently were frightened off.

A number of the tools found at the scene in Syracuse bore Canadian trademarks.